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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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February 24, 1970

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Highlights of Symington Subcommittee Session on
Korea, February 24, 1970 (1)

DISTRIBUTION:

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S/S
EA - Ambassador Green
- Ambassador Brown
- Mr. Moore
EA/K - Mr. Peters
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PM/JW - Mr. Wolf
S/PC - Mr. Cargo
- Mr. Seligmann
- Mr. Armacost
H - Ambassador Torbert
WH - Mr. Ehrlichman
NSC - Mr. Lehman
DOD - Mr. French
- Mr. Knauer /

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In addition to Senator Symington and Senator Fulbright, who were present throughout the afternoon, Senators Aiken and Javits sat in on parts of the hearings.

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After Ambassador Porter read those portions of his statement that related specifically to U.S. commitments in Korea, Counsel sought to establish whether the frequent reaffirmations of our commitment by the President and Vice-President tended to expand or inflate the commitment contained in the 1954 treaty. Ambassador Porter and Ambassador Brown denied that what Senator Fulbright referred to as the "extravagant" and "improvident" rhetoric of President Johnson (specifically his assurance that the U.S. would "act promptly to defeat" enemy aggression) extended our obligations beyond the legal commitment to consult with the ROK about actions designed to meet the common danger in accordance with our constitutional processes.

Senator Symington questioned whether U.S. troops poised on the DMZ had orders to counter-attack across the DMZ in the event of North Korean aggression. General Michaelis stated that U.S. forces were deployed along 18 miles of the 151 mile frontier, that a prudent commander naturally had contingency plans, but that he was not prepared to discuss them. Ambassador Porter explained that

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in the event of a North Korean attack, the U.S. authorities in the field would consult with the ROK and with the U.S. Government before determining an appropriate course of action. We are not obliged, he stated, to consult with any other governments.

Counsel asked whether the Sixteen Nation Declaration was still in effect, and if so, why there had been any necessity for a bilateral treaty. Ambassador Porter indicated that the Declaration had neither been denounced nor retracted; hence it is still in effect. It amounted to a policy statement, however, and not a legal commitment. Moreover, while the moral sanction of such a declaration was of some value to the South Koreans and to the U.S., it did not provide the sort of reassurance that the South Koreans needed in the aftermath of the 1950-53 War.

A number of questions were raised about the Brown letter, especially about the circumstances that prompted it to be written and the commitments it contained. Ambassador Porter and Ambassador Brown explained that the purpose of the letter was to clarify and reaffirm our commitment to the ROK at a time when they were considering the dispatch

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of troops to Vietnam and were naturally apprehensive regarding the possible consequences of this decision upon their own security. Thus the Brown letter was designed to allay governmental and public anxieties in Korea.

On this score, Senator Fulbright wished to know why, if the purpose was to generate public confidence, the letter had been classified.

As for what the South Korean government wanted, Ambassador Brown stated that they wanted assurances of a more automatic American response in case of attack and a pledge that we would not withdraw forces from Korea without their consent. They got neither, though we did agree not to significantly reduce our forces in Korea without consulting them.

Senator Fulbright wished to know why the South Koreans needed constant reaffirmations of our support. Ambassador Porter explained that their anxieties on this score were rooted in fears of North Korean aggression, suspicion of Russian and Chinese intentions,

a lack of confidence in Japanese support in a crisis, and a deep appreciation of the special relationship they enjoy with the United States and a natural desire to preserve it.

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Counsel wished to know whether, in Ambassador Porter's judgment, the treaty or American troops in Korea were a greater source of reassurance to the ROKG. Ambassador Porter indicated that he could not, of course, speak for the Koreans, but he believed that the treaty was more significant.

Several questions were asked about the degree to which our commitment to South Korea was affected by the ROK's dispatch of troops to Vietnam. Ambassador Porter explained that our commitment remained what it had been. While we agreed to prior consultations before withdrawing significant numbers of forces from Korea, we did not thereby preclude troop reductions. What, Counsel asked, do prior consultations mean in this context? Just what it says, Ambassador Porter replied.

Senator Symington inquired into the procedures through which the ROK troop contribution in Vietnam had been arranged. Ambassador Brown stated that we had relayed a written request from the government of Vietnam to Seoul, that President Johnson had discussed the matter orally with President Park, and that he (Ambassador Brown) had put the

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matter to the South Korean Government orally. The South Koreans then made a cabinet decision to send troops and secured the requisite approval for the decision from the exchange National Assembly. This was followed by a discussion of the timing of the various requests for ROK non-combatant and combat units, the U.S. role in encouraging and expediting South Korean compliance with the requests, and expressions of feigned amazement from several Senators that whereas we sent troops to Vietnam in response to oral entreaties, the South Koreans had received a written request.

Questions then focussed upon the benefits which accrued to the ROK in return for their troop contribution. Senator Fulbright elaborated on the "mercenary" theme and sought to establish by implication that the ROK contributions were inspired by the prospect of pecuniary benefits rather than gratitude for our past efforts on their behalf or genuine concern for the collective security of Asia. He was especially critical of the secrecy which surrounded the arrangements for financial subventions to ROK troops, intimating that this was designed to sustain the illusion that South Korea was sending troops out of the goodness of their hearts.

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General Michaelis suggested that secrecy was maintained in order to preserve our bargaining position in relation to other troop contributors. Ambassador Porter and Ambassador Brown acknowledged that the South Korean Government had sought the most favorable terms, but strongly defended ROK motives asserting that President Park and his colleagues were genuinely moved by a desire to repay obligations to those who had come to the ROK's defense. They also reminded Senators Symington and Fulbright, who expressed doubts about the returns we had received from our substantial aid investment in South Korea, that ROK has been transformed since 1953 from a state on the verge of economic collapse and physical exhaustion into one of the most vigorous economies in Asia.

Senator Fulbright inquired about the military strength of ROK relative to North Korea. General Michaelis indicated that the nature of terrain and airpower available to North Korea offset the disparity of numbers in ROK's favor. This led Senator Symington to comment on the relative merits of Soviet and American patterns of offering aid and U.S.

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dereliction for not putting additional sophisticated planes into production to match Soviet advanced models.

General Holderness assured the Senators that our planes were quite the match for any available to North Korea when one took pilot performance into account.

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